OLD NURSES' HOME NEW ROLE

By Liam Timmins

Galway County Council have confirmed their commitment to proceed with the acquisition of St. Brigid's Nursing Home, opposite the derelict main hospital campus, with plans to convert the space into a refuge for women and children facing domestic violence.

There was a very warm welcome for the news from Director of Services Liam Hanrahan from the members present in the Chamber at the monthly MDC meetings when he briefed them in detail what had now been formally agreed.

The 64-acre site intends to be used for short term accommodation for victims county-wide, with services offered in collaboration with COPE Galway and CUAN. The council ran into some difficulties in their attempted purchase, with the HSE reportedly offering little communication and assistance during engagements last year.

"This acquisition will mark a pivotal moment in addressing the pressing need for own-door accommodation in a domestic violence refuge for women and children" states Galway Leas Cathaoirleach Cllr Evelyn Parsons, "There is currently no domestic violence refuge in the administrative area of Galway County Council, and it is much needed as the escalation of violence year on year demonstrates."

Cllr Evelyn Parsons outside the derelict St. Brigids Nursing Home

At a recent Ballinasloe Municipal District meeting confirming the council's acquisition commitment, Director of Services Liam Hanrahan noted some additional benefits for purchasing these lands. Firstly, the access to this site and use of the river bank zone will help advance the Ballinasloe Flood Relief Scheme which includes proposals to protect the town from water damage. A second tranche of the lands now has plans advanced to use the space to help meet demands for recreational facilities in Creagh, potentially establishing playgrounds and other leisure facilities for the population growing area. There is also a possibility that some of the land currently zoned agricultural will be used for housing demand in the future.

As the building gradually dilapidates and is left in ruins, Cllrs Dr. Evelyn Parsons also hopes these works will also improve the aesthetic of the streetscape it resides on. "By repurposing the derelict St. Brigid's Nurses' Home, this development will significantly enhance the town's aesthetics with the development of what has become an eyesore building while providing a secure site for essential services" she notes.

Cllr. Parsons had been campaigning through her role on the HSE West Forum and Galway County Council in highlighting this solution for the domestic and child abuse she has long been an advocate for support for since her pre political career.

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